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Ex-Hazleton CIA Officer Author Of Spy Novel 'The Rope Dancer'

By BETTY HARLOR

A Hazleton native who served for 14 years as an officer in the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency has turned his life in the espionage profession into a suspenseful novel. In "The Rope Dancer," Victor Marchetti tells what it's really like to be an agent for a super-secret organization.

The book by the 41-year-old Marchetti, now a resident of Oakton, Va., officially will be published by Grosset and Dunlap, Inc. of New York Thursday.

The novelist, who formerly lived at 137 N. Wyoming St., is the son of Victor Marchetti, also residing in Oakton, and of the late Martha Marchetti. He is married to the former Bernice Baran, Beaver Meadows.

Was S-S Carrier

Marchetti, once a carrier for the Standard-Speaker, joined the CIA in 1955 and attained the rank equivalent of a full colonel. He spent the bulk of his career working on the Soviet problem largely as an analyst of military developments, moving up the organizational ladder through assignments in research, operations, current intelligence and national estimates.

He finally entered CIA management where he was executive assistant to the Deputy Director and special assistant to the Executive Director and assistant to the Chief of Planning, Programming and Budgeting.

Sees CIA Out-of-Step

After a few years of working and watching at the executive level, Marchetti came to the conclusion that U.S. Intelligence is too affluent, too bureaucratic, amazingly inefficient and ineffective, unbelievably lacking in control and direction and generally out of step with the times and needs of the nation. Because of his eventual disillusionment with its policies and his critical attitude toward its bureaucracy, he resigned from the CIA in 1969 and turned to writing fiction.

"The Rope Dancer" is his initial effort. Another title for the factual thriller by the ex-CIA officer could be "Top Secret: The Nice Guy Next Door is a Soviet Agent."

To his neighbors in suburban Washington, Paul Franklin, the main character in the novel, is a good fellow—devoted to his two rambunctious sons, loyal husband to his attractive wife Nancy. To espionage operatives on two continents, he is one of history's top spies, trading vital U.S. secrets for unprecedented sums and switching his allegiance as fast as jets can take him to East Berlin and Moscow.

Tracks Double Life

In "The Rope Dancer," Marchetti tracks Paul's double life and shows how a top intelligence officer can smuggle U.S. secrets under the very noses of the highest-ranking American intelligence officials.

From the moment that Paul defects to the Communists, his life becomes a dance with danger, leading to clandestine meetings with the intriguing Vera; his Soviet case officer, Yuri; and even with the head of the infamous Soviet KGB.

While honors and other rewards are secretly heaped upon him in the Kremlin, Paul is threatened by betrayal from within the Communist forces and by the vicious pincer movement of U.S. counter-espionage, masterminded by the wile Wellington. As the pressures build against him, Paul finds himself walled in by a suspicious accidental death, the nervous breakdown of a key agency secretary, and by out-in-out murder.

Although Marchetti did not seek to write an expose of the CIA, he has told a realistic and revealing story of how the agency works, using the novel as his medium. "The Rope Dancer," however, is not an ordinary espionage story. In many respects, it is the most realistic spy novel to be produced since John Le Carre's "The Spy Who Came in from the Cold."

No James Bond Act

The hero is no dashing and fantastic James Bond doing silly and impossible things, nor is he the usual overly sophisticated gentleman master spy of so many British murder mysteries masquerading as espionage novels. Paul Franklin is typical of the kind of men who really do work in the intelligence business, and this is what sets the novel apart from the others.

Most spy stories are written by men and women who wouldn't recognize a real spy if they tripped over one. "The Rope Dancer" was authored by a former professional, who also happens to be a native of this area.

Marchetti admits the characters and situations, although fictional, are drawn from life in the espionage profession. It reflects, he says, "what one sees and learns when working in the executive suite of a super-secret agency."

"The crushing burden of clandestinity, the political maneuverings and hypocrisy, the bureaucratic drudgery—these are portrayed as honestly and realistically as is possible in a work of fiction. After years in the trade and after having read hundreds of imitation spy stories, I wanted to tell it like it really is."

Spies Frustrating

The former CIA agent feels that

spies are frustratingly ordinary at times and dazzlingly extraordinary on occasion. They may appear to be simple-type people in their everyday life, he says, but they may actually be rebels who strongly detest their own rebelliousness or romantics capable of extreme ruthlessness and even cruelty.

In an early review, John Barcum of the Saturday Review Syndicate wrote that "The Rope Dancer" is so realistic and so well plotted that one can only hope it is not true.

Although the spy thriller is Marchetti's first writing effort, he has completed the first draft of another novel. This he has set aside to work on a non-fiction book—a

critical analysis of the U.S. intelligence system. Negotiations also are under way in New York and elsewhere regarding foreign, paperback and movie rights for "The Rope Dancer."

HMS Grad

The author, who expects to visit Hazleton early this fall, attended Holy Trinity Parochial School, North Laurel Street, and was graduated from Hazleton High School, where he played football and was active in dramatics.

His father, uncle and grandfather operated Marchetti's Plumbing and Heating, North Wyoming Street.

After attending the Hazleton Campus of the Pennsylvania State University for two years, Marchetti went to live in New York's Greenwich Village for a year and took classes at NYU. He then moved on to Paris, where he enrolled at the Sorbonne.

The former local man joined the U.S. Army in Germany in 1951 and was assigned to intelligence duties on the East German border. Two years later he was discharged there. Marchetti went back to Paris, then to New York and finally returned here to marry Bernice Baran, who is the daughter of Mrs. Anna Baran, Beaver Meadows, and of the late Wassil Baran.

After eight years of wandering and wondering, Marchetti relates he enrolled again at Penn State and attained a college diploma. His work with the Central Intelligence Agency followed.

Mr. and Mrs. Marchetti are the parents of three sons, the eldest of who plays football at Oakton High School. They live outside the village of Oakton, near Vienna, Va., a suburb of the nation's capital.

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